



Team 2-70 Armor executes a LOG-PAC during training at Hohenfels.

Improving Your Company Trains Operations

by Captain Andrew I. Green

The wind blew cold over the plains of Hohenfels...

The commander sat back; his armor team had just fought a pitched battle with the enemy forward security element of the OPFOR battalion and had utterly destroyed them. He had suffered some losses, but nothing compared to the destruction he had dealt to his foe. He could taste the praise his battalion commander would give him for his victory; he would be a hero among the commanders. All of his months of training and preparation had finally paid off.

Now, he waited for the 1SG to bring forward the company trains and begin the less glamorous job of casualty evacuation and vehicle repair and evacuation. He watched the trains begin their work. For some reason, things weren't going well. His medic track mistakenly went to a tank that only had a slightly wounded tanker on it while bypassing several tanks with soldiers needing immediate evacuation. His M88 recovery vehicle and maintenance M113 waited on the road for someone to guide them to a downed vehicle and for the medics to clear the battle area. He could hear the frustration of the platoon sergeants and platoon leaders on the company radio net as they tried to

guide the medics and mechanics to the less obviously damaged vehicles. The commander had to admit that, until you could get close enough to see their bumper numbers, all the M1s and M2s looked the same.

As time went on, things got worse, the medic track quickly filled up, and many wounded still needed evacuation. The commander, in an act of desperation, tried helping out by sending in his HMMWV, but it got tangled in barbed wire and now was down for maintenance. His M88 was lost looking for a stuck tank in a well-concealed position. When the tank commander tried to give the mechanics his position using company graphics, he discovered that the M88 driver had used the map board as a lunch tray and the correct checkpoint was buried under yesterday's "Pork in BBQ" sauce.

Now things became desperate; many of his company wounded in action (WIAs) were now dying of their wounds. There were too many casualties and not enough evac vehicles with room to put the litters. Every time his medics took another load, it seemed like forever before they returned. The battalion medic assets that he had always counted on to help weren't avail-

able. In addition, his maintenance team was lost, and required someone to go find them and bring them back to the company area. To top it off, his 1SG had to leave to pick up an incoming LOGPAC. In desperation, he called in his XO to bring order to the impending chaos, but even with both of them coordinating the support effort, it seemed like no one knew what they were doing.

In the end, many of the commander's soldiers died of wounds, he lost his M88 to a minefield, and only half his vehicles made the follow-on mission due to many missing the LOGPAC and running low on fuel. The welcome he received from the task force commander differed radically from the one he had envisioned.

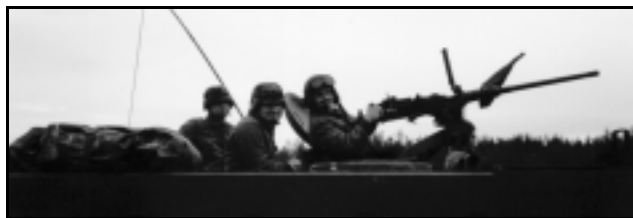
Making the Plan

How can we, as armor leaders, keep this from happening to us? The answers can't be found in FM 71-1, FM 71-123, or FKSM 17-16. They deal with armor team operations but, other than generalizations, give little specific guidance. As with many important lessons, one must use many different sources and personal experiences to fix these problems. Here is one solution.

Trains Training at Hohenfels

At right, mechanics from B Co., 2-70 Armor train with crew-served weapons. Below right, Headquarters Platoon recovery team, which recorded the fastest recovery times of any 1993 CMTC rotation.

Below, mechanics fix a tank at a unit collection point.



Effective company trains operations can be the key to a successful NTC or CMTC rotation and are critical to any combat situation. Unfortunately, we rarely train them as intensely as we do our combat drills. Most good ISGs can handle LOGPAC operations, casualty reporting, and company trains operations during limited platoon and company ARTEP training events. Unfortunately, these offer few opportunities to train casualty and vehicle evacuation operations with all the distractions of realistic training or combat. With lane training and reliance on using the local training area, it's rare that company trains players deal with land navigation, evacuation, or recovery operations above the platoon level in an unfamiliar environment. LOGPAC times are often structured and routine, with plenty of "admin time" to allow everyone to find the assembly area and eat a leisurely meal. Vehicles with major maintenance problems are often towed back to the motor pool and worked on in the rear, as no one wants to have any extra vehicle down days against their Operational Readiness rate. The medics generally are whatever team is available and don't look at their maps as, "they know the area." These situations don't train the key players in the company post-battle operations to the level required at the training centers or in combat.

Where does one start? First, the CO, XO, and ISG must decide on a plan to improve their trains operations and set goals to work on identifiable weaknesses. A commonly understood, easily recognizable signal system must also

be created and disseminated to each vehicle in the company, with extra sets of signal material ready to provide to attachments and slice elements. VS-17 panels and gunnery flags work well for this.

Next, set aside time to rehearse and train full-scale post-battle operations. One idea is to practice casualty evacuation play at a SIMNET event with platoon sergeants reporting, the medic team and maintenance team chief role playing their part of the operation and keeping records on the vehicles down and casualties reported. All LOGPAC operations should be a rehearsal for the real thing. Vary the technique, decrease the time allowed, hold the soldiers to the standard every time, and keep security and vehicle density to a minimum. The ISG is the key, and he has to be the enforcer of the plan. Therefore, he must believe in it and hold the rest of the company to the commander's standards.

Casualty Evacuation

One medic track isn't enough! Combat lifesavers can stabilize the wounded, but most wounds typical of armored combat (burns, major punctures, and amputation injuries) require rapid medical evacuation and skilled medical treatment. Using operable combat vehicles to evacuate the wounded in an unsecured battle area is not practical, as it is rarely obvious when a lull in combat will occur and how long it will last, so it is impractical to allow soldiers to leave the battle area with one of your major weapons and

evac the wounded. Wheeled vehicles are rarely practical in the main battle area because obstacles and munitions abound that will soon render them inoperable. Therefore, the M113 armored medics are still the primary casualty evacuators. With some prior planning, the company commander can triple his casualty evacuation assets. All the company M113s can be fitted with litter kits and carry litters tied to the top or outside. Casevac takes priority over vehicle recovery, so the ISG's and the maintenance track can also help with medical evacuation until the medics alone are able to handle the flow of wounded. Wheels can be consolidated into a casualty transfer point on a safe intermediate rear area road position, and casualties transferred, thus keeping the tracks closer to the battle position. Good rehearsals are the key to this operation, and at least one combat lifesaver in each vehicle is a must. Route recons are also critical, and ambulance transfer points, locations of main and jump aid stations, battalion and company checkpoints, and all combat vehicle positions, if possible, must be passed down to every vehicle in the company. The ISG must play traffic control boss and direct the medevac vehicles to the wounded, as the reports come in, while evacuating wounded in his track. It's hard, but the results are worth it.

Vehicle Recovery

The M88 is an underutilized asset, usually maintained in the rear as time permits. It is allowed to sit idle most of the year, employed only to pull packs

during services or driven to assembly areas to sit until someone gets stuck or needs to be dragged back from ARTEPs. The M88 driver generally follows the ISG or some other guide, rarely land navigates, and uses map boards for card tables and food trays. If anyone has the wrong mission graphics, it is liable to be the mechanics. The correct graphics for the current mission are usually stuck in a cubby hole or under someone's tool box in the crew compartment. The reason: few leaders expect more from these soldiers, or take the time to train them. Fixing this problem is crucial to improving your vehicle recovery operations. With the maintenance team chief doing casevac, the M88 is unescorted on the battlefield; this is his time to shine. With a working knowledge of the plan, and platoon sergeants calling for assistance, the M88 crew can begin the vehicle evacuation process before the battle is over. All non-functioning combat vehicles need to be taken off the battlefield eventually, and it is better to start early than wait until it is too late.

To facilitate faster maintenance and battle damage repair, the vehicle collection point should be in a relatively safe area to the rear of the immediate battlefield. Ensure that this area isn't too close to casevac routes or supply routes, as once vehicles are being maintained, they can be hard to move. The benefits of using a company-level maintenance collection point, run by the maintenance team chief, are many. Security improves as mutual support from semi-combat ready vehicles can overwatch those less able. Vehicles evacuated there can be worked on more safely until all of the down vehicles are collected, parts cross-leveled, and maintenance priorities established.

The limited number of company maintenance personnel and their equipment can be co-located to speed repair and recovery times. Vehicles obviously in need of evacuation can be sent rearward after being stripped of needed parts to repair other, less damaged vehicles. Resupply of this area is easier than trying to find individual downed vehicles for LOGPAC operations. Interplatoon recovery is enhanced because the company maintenance area can allow combat vehicles to tow damaged vehicles to safety and more quickly return to the combat area. Finally, if task force recovery assets move forward to assist the company/team, it is much faster if they go to a single location, rather than wandering around an unfam-

iliar battlefield looking for broken vehicles.

Security Is Everyone's Job

The combat trains must also be able to fight. These forward operations require the support vehicles to operate semi-independently and in an unsecured battlefield. The crews of vehicles with crew-served weapons must be comfortable with their ability to use the weapons and may need to be augmented with AT-4s and small arms. MILES gunnery for training events must also be taught to support soldiers so that they see some reason to fire their weapons. This, of course, means that they must be given ammunition during training events, something that many mechanics don't ask for and, therefore, don't receive. The company trains can also improve their fighting ability by placing your attached air defenders in their M2 vehicles between them and the company during movements, or with them when stopped. The Stinger's long range will reach past the combat vehicles in front and the Bradley 25-mm chain gun can kill any marauding BMPs that threaten your trains.

One final asset that can be used better is the company master gunner. He can aid the ISG in reporting during the reconstitution phase of post-battle ops. If given the role of CINC/wheels, he can provide senior leadership in the casualty exchange point and when the ISG is rearward doing LOGPAC operations.

Conclusion

Good casualty and vehicle evacuation operations require innovative use of company assets, prior planning, and rehearsals. A simple plan, well rehearsed and enforced, as well as the complete inclusion of all company members in during- and post-battle operations, will ensure that no soldier or vehicle is lost due to wasted time or lack of coordination.

Finally...

The commander sat back, his armor team had just fought a pitched battle with the enemy forward security element and had destroyed them utterly. He had suffered some losses, but nothing compared to what he had dealt to his foe. All of his months of training had finally paid off. He waited for the ISG to bring forward the company trains and begin the essential job of

casualty evacuation, and vehicle repair and evacuation. His men were his primary concern now, and he demanded that they be taken care of. He watched the trains begin their work. His casevac track went to every vehicle with wounded, most serious to less urgent, as shown by his easily-identified-from-a-distance company marking system. His ISG coordinated the effort with a practiced ease, guiding the M113s using company and task force graphics to each vehicle. His M88 recovery vehicle tirelessly drove around the battlefield, dragging the damaged vehicles to the vehicle collection point, where mechanics waited to work on repairing any that could be quickly returned to combat. He could hear the platoon sergeants and platoon leaders as they reported their losses to the master gunner who sent the reports to the task force until the ISG was finished with casevac. His M88 bypassed a minefield that was on his graphics and recovered a stuck tank in a hard-to-find wood line.

His medevac times were once again excellent, and didn't slow as his ISG left to go pick up an incoming LOGPAC. The battalion medic assets that he had always planned on to help weren't available, but they were able to use the commander's and the ISG's HMMWVs to speed the most seriously wounded to the jump aid station. In the end, the commander had succeeded, with all of his vehicles making LOGPAC, and being the first company to be Redcon 1 for the task force's next mission. Needless to say, his company received high praise from their observer/controllers and, more importantly, from the task force commander himself.

Captain Andrew I. Green was commissioned in 1989 from Seattle University ROTC. A graduate of AOBC, AOAC, and Ranger School, he served as a tank platoon leader in 1/69 Armor, Kitzingen, Germany, and as a tank platoon leader, tank company XO, and battalion adjutant, 2/70 Armor, Erlangen, Germany. He is currently a recruiting company commander in Manhattan, Kan. His next duty station will be Ft. Stewart, Ga.